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ART APPLIED TO DECORATION AND FURNITURE OF MODERN HOUSES.

By ROBERT W. EDIS, F.S.A., ARCHITECT,
Author of "Decoration and Furnishing of Town Houses, &c., &c."

NUMBER ONE.—INTRODUCTORY.

IN COMMENCING a series of articles on the application of artistic taste in design to the decoration of the houses we live in, in the DECORATOR AND FURNISHER, I may clear the way for any further remarks, by insisting as strongly as possible, that art, in association with our home belongings, cannot be treated in any way as a separate art, and that good taste or good design is as much a matter of the cultivation and education of the sense of sight, as the appreciation of good cooking, pleasant smells or delightful music is dependent upon the inclination of the particular sense with which these matters are more intimately associated. Good decoration—that is, pleasant and harmonious coloring of wall surfaces, harmony of tints in the various hangings and carpets, and in the innumerable objects of every day use—as well as graceful form and simple detail in the furniture and fittings of the house, are, or should be, as easy to obtain in everything about us, as the vulgar flimsiness and gaudiness of household fittings to which we have been so long accustomed. I hold that every home may be made artistic and pleasant in coloring and arrangement, that it is simply a matter of good taste and careful thought, and that every home should be made harmonious and artistic in its general decoration and furnishing. We do not hang "daubs" in our picture galleries, or put up for a moment with illy cooked food, unpleasant smells or discordant sounds, why then should we put up with ill assorted colors, or ungraceful and hideous furniture, neither useful nor comfortable. If the art work of our homes is treated as a separate thing, as something to be left to the mere upholsterer or manufacturer, it is all false, and has no real life. Let me not be misunderstood, the upholsterer and the manufacturer may exercise more real influence than any amount of writing and talking, but this influence can only be of lasting service when they themselves have become educated artists, and, as such, sound and desirable teachers for the great mass of the people, with a practical and intelligent knowledge of what is required of them, and making their wares, as Mr. Ruskin says, "educational instruments," instead of "mere drugs of the market."

The subject of house decoration and furnishing is one which is gradually forcing its way upon every educated person. We are no longer content to cover our walls with gaudy and ill designed wall coverings, or to fill our rooms with comfortless and vulgar furniture.

This development of a desire to cultivate the sense of sight, and to make the homes we live in more beautiful in color and general good taste, has, as a matter of course, engendered various fashions and crazes which tend to disgust a good many common sense people, but even in these fashions and crazes there are elements of good, inasmuch as they foster and encourage a desire for better artistic treatment in the things with which we surround ourselves, and we may safely leave to the general common sense of the educated public, the upsetting of the conceited cant of so-called "esthetes," and to accept so much only of their teaching as is based on common sense and practical requirements. Fashions have their good, as well as evil sides. They have helped to create a love for ancient art, to point out various periods in which the design of furniture was fairly good and suitable, and, by the adaptation and imitation of these designs, to bring before the public types of art-work which are essentially good in form, and if they have produced nothing original, they have caused manufacturers and tradesmen to seek for better forms in furniture, and greater harmony of design and color in a great deal of the work connected with house decoration and furniture.

It is far better to look back to any period of art, in which good form and artistic design and coloring are evinced, than to continue the vulgar anachronisms of design and decoration of the more modern schools of upholsterers, for this imitation and copyism of ancient examples necessarily tends to a closer study of them, and a higher education of the sense of sight. Mere fashion and caprice cannot, in the nature of things, be lasting, but we may fairly expect that the fashion which has necessitated the highest art education of the manufacturer and workman, and through them of the public generally, will have, so far, a lasting and good effect upon the nature and character of our home fittings and belongings.

The various art museums of the world, which modern science has brought within the reach of most of us, contain examples of every kind of art-

work in decoration and furniture, and innumerable publications which have illustrated these examples, whether of upholstery, tissues, faience, pottery or metal work, show indisputably, that in the best period of art there was just as much thought and artistic character in the commonest, as in the most elaborate work. Nor can it be too strongly urged that there is no real life in the art work of a nation, which does not impress itself, so to speak, upon every designed or manufactured object, whether it be in the elaborate and richly painted and carved shrine, or in the humblest specimens of the potters art. The poorest cottage may just as well be fitted with things beautiful in themselves, no matter how cheap or humble, as the richest and proudest mansions. The art which can only provide for the rich is useless, for it depends not upon the art education of the masses, but rather on those few artists, whose works can only be obtained at enormous cost, and when completed are absorbed and hidden away in the collections of the wealthy, and have no real influence for good on the great majority of the people.

Good art, in the everyday things about us, must necessarily exercise a refining influence upon all, the love of the beautiful engenders order, comfort and cleanliness, and a greater regard for sanitation and all other matters which tend to the health and well-being of humanity.

It is just as easy to make our homes beautiful as it is to render them tasteless and ugly, just as easy to have well designed furniture, pretty papers, and hangings, good form in "pots and pans," as to have everything about us vulgar, crude and tawdry; but if we are to change the old order of things it must be by the use of practical common sense as well as taste; comfort, use and suitability must be combined with good design, and art made to assist in beautifying the work, not in taking away from its convenience or practical use for ordinary requirements. All good designs, whether in decoration or furniture, must be made to work in with modern requirements and every-day purposes; and in my future articles I propose to point out, to the best of my ability, how our homes may be improved and bettered by a little thought and a proper regard to use, suitability and common sense, in the design and arrangement of their decoration and furnishing; and to show that the decorative arts are necessarily part and parcel of the building as well of the fitting up of our home, and that in association with the sister arts of architecture, painting and sculpture, they may make our homes not only artistic but comfortable, beautiful and healthy, and it is well to remember that "all the greatest art which the world has produced is fitted for a place and subordinate to a purpose. There is no existing highest order but is decorative. The best sculpture yet produced has been the decoration of a temple front—the best painting the decoration of a room. Raphael's best doing is merely the wall-coloring of a suite of apartments in the Vatican, and his cartoons were made for tapestries. Correggio's best doing is the decoration of two small church cupolas at Parma; Michel Angelo's, of a ceiling in the Pope's private room; Tintoret's, of a ceiling and sidewalk belonging to a charitable society at Venice; while Titian and Veronese threw out their noblest thoughts, not even on the inside, but on the outside of the common brick and plaster walls of Venice."

WE have just received the catalogue of Mr. ALEX. BURNETT'S First North of Scotland Ceramic Art Exhibition of Paintings on China and Terra Cotta and Tapestry. The Exhibition was held in the town buildings of Montrose, and, we should judge from the list of articles displayed, must have been of unusual merit. The first prize went to Miss Austin Carter for an original painting on china. The subject was "The Fountain."

Altogether, the paintings in every line showed taste and talent.

THE ROYAL CANADIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS.—The establishment of this Academy is due to the thoughtfulness and energy of the Marquis of Lorne, although the idea may be said to have originated in the Ontario Society of Artists. It has now become one of the largest and finest in existence, and its paintings are best seen in the National Academy of Canada.

PAINTERS.—Frescoers and paint dealers will, we hope, inform us of any new colors, materials or appliances in their line.

TO MANUFACTURERS.—Those manufacturing furniture, wall paper, draperies, and the like, are asked to advise us for notice, free of charge, of any new design or material which they may originate or know of.

THE AVERAGE SALESMAN.

Scene—WALL-PAPER ESTABLISHMENT.

Enter MR. and MRS. JONES; advance from rear, the AVERAGE SALESMAN.

A. S.—Ah, good morning, good morning! Can I be of service?

Mr. J.—We desire to see some wall paper; if you will kindly show us some styles, and—

A. S.—Certainly, certainly, with pleasure; step this way, please; something for dining room, I suppose, beginning at bottom of house, the style now-a-days; just fitted up Mr. Smith's house, 250th St., Fifth Avenue, from cellar to roof with elegant selections of modern art from one dollar to ten dollars a roll; fact, 'shure you—

Mr. J.—Oh, no—something for a bed room, please; something quiet and not too—

A. S.—Oh, not doing whole house, all same; but wouldn't you like to see how the thing would work, beginning at the lower rooms; no trouble, 'shure you, glad to show you, may change your mind, got some beautiful goods, lot just landed at four dollars a roll; just step this way, please—

Mrs. J.—Thank you, but we can hardly spare time, and will only trouble—

A. S.—No, trouble, 'shure you—lets see, bed room—there you are, fashionable style, sunflower decoration, cat-tail frieze, effect beautiful—

Mr. J.—I am afraid that is too garish for a bed room.

A. S.—Ah, think so?—we fitted up Mrs. Wilde's room thus, much admired—how would you like this—pompeian red with peacock blue panels, steel blue frieze—very fine—here's another combination, and here's another, prevailing styles and colors, very artistic, 'shure you—

Mr. J.—I am afraid those are a little too loud—perhaps you would like to know how our room is furnished?

A. S.—O, certainly, just the thing, get the idea then—

Mrs. J.—Mahogany furniture; prevailing color in carpet, blue with wood color, roses, &c.; scrym curtains, trimmed with antique lace; hand-embroidered blue sateen lambrequins; ceiling merely tinted in delicate pink, with shaded cornice. Now, have you got some paper that would harmonize, at about—

A. S.—Ah, that's a very harmonious arrangement, have got just the thing—here's an elegant new shade of cotta, and I can put with it this magnificent crimson frieze with bottle green decorations—

Mr. and Mrs. J.—Oh, wont that kill the blue and pink?

A. S.—Oh, no, just the thing, sets the others off—contrasts all the rage now—just fitted Mrs. Dasher's Fifth Avenue house in that style, fact, 'shure you.

Mrs. J.—I confess I cannot admire it—

A. S.—Sorry—but we have got just what you want, I know. Allow me, here's this elegant dark green ground with gold and red, and this frieze to match—and, oh, here's the thing, aint that a gem, imagine the effect of that violet ground, yellow, red and gold designs, this is bound to be a favorite style, and the newest, none placed yet in the city, hadn't you better secure the first lot—just the thing for your room (displays a dozen other styles while talking.)

Mrs. J. (slightly sarcastic)—Perhaps you have a department in which you have some papers with a cast of blue in them?

A. S.—Blue, oh yes, plenty, more'n hundred styles—there you are, dark blue, elegant—

Mr. J.—But that is much darker than the carpet—that won't do—

A. S.—Oh! here's the thing—light blue with crimson vines—heres another, and another, and—

Mrs. J. (interrupting)—Excuse me, let me see that one before the last (uncovers it)—there, that is just what we want, that light blue ground, with the gold vine, buds and flowers make a combination that will harmonize perfectly with the rest of the room, and the frieze matches it so nicely—

Mr. J.—Yes, that's the thing; no set geometrical figures to weary the eye, or puzzle a sick brain, no fans that you always expect to see waving, no birds to flap their wings and soar off. I am sorry we have troubled you so much, sir; we would have been pleased with this, at first. What price did you say? One-fifty; well that is more than we had expected, but, Mrs. J., don't you think we had better take it?

Mr. J. acquiesces, of course, gives the address and arrangements are made for delivery.

The "Average Salesman" hugs his usual delusion that he has shown wonderful judgment, and is the smartest fellow in the store.

Mr. and Mrs. J. walk out, and, outside of the door, Mrs. J. gives vent to a most heartfelt ejaculation that she hopes never to see that salesman again, in which Mr. J. agrees, with some internal additions, and hurries on to his business, thinking on his way that if he kept a Decorative Establishment he would endeavor to have his clerks understand some of the first principles of Decoration, at least.